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Safety in the Sewers ◆ Uncrowding Local Jails

A Publication of Communication Channels, Inc.

JUNE 1988

AMERICAN CITY & COUNTY®

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Hundreds, even thousands, of natural and man-made pollutants can threaten public water supplies and health. The millions of people who live in the Ohio River Valley got a first-hand lesson in January, when one of the nation's largest inland oil spills contaminated their water supply. How did their local officials cope with the catastrophe? What did they learn? Could such an accident happen again, and how can other American cities and counties prepare for it?

Six months have passed since an Ashland Oil Co. storage tank in Pittsburgh collapsed, dumping more than 3 million gallons of no. 2 diesel fuel into the Monongahela River. The spill brought to light a dilemma every water supplier or manager faces — what to do when the potable water supply is contaminated. There have been dozens of other spills and accidents of equal or greater magnitude than the one last January. But what works for one oil spill may not work for another. Also, chemical spills and accidents involving hazardous materials require totally different treatments. As a re-

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Oil on the Ohio

Lessons Learned

By Tim Darnell

AWWA Show Issue

AMERICAN CITY & COUNTY®

June 1988 Vol. 103, No. 6

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Cover photography by Vince Musi, SIPA/Pittsburgh Press

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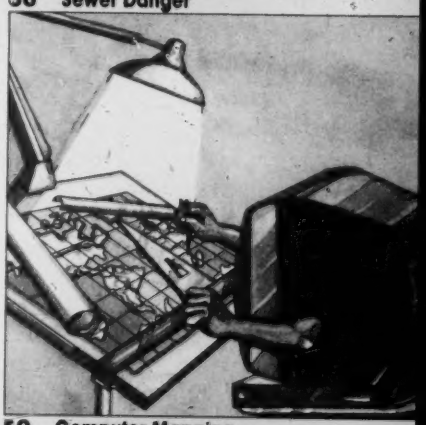

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BPA American City & County is published monthly by Communication Channels, Inc., George E. Fowkes, Chairman of the Board; Jerrold France, President; Scott Smith, Secretary; Buford Bryant, Treasurer. Editorial and advertising offices at 6255 Barfield Road, Atlanta, GA 30328. Telephone 404-256-9800. American City & County is a registered trademark of Communication Channels, Inc.

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Second-class postage paid at Atlanta, Ga., and at additional mailing offices. Subscription rates: U.S.A., 1 year, $42; 2 years, $70; Canada and Mexico, 1 year, $46; Foreign, 1 year, $80; overseas air mail, $107; Single copies, $3.50; Municipal Index, $44.50 (Domestic) and $57.50 (Foreign). The opinions expressed by authors and contributors to American City & County are not necessarily those of the editors or publisher.

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Microfilm copies of American City & County are available from Xerox University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Mich., 48109. Postmaster: Please send form 3579 to Circulation Department, American City & County, 6255 Barfield Road, Atlanta, GA 30328.
ISSN 0149-337X

The Continuing Crises

The picture in a recent brochure from consulting engineers Brown & Caldwell spoke volumes. Here was a monstrous, gaping hole, nearly a block long, extending into yards of homes on both sides of the street, and deep enough to engulf the houses on either side. The street was gone, gobbled up by a collapsed sewer line.

This was no scene from the "infrastructure crisis" of 1988. This picture was 31 years old.

The infrastructure crisis is not new; neither are the more people-oriented concerns of poverty, hunger and homelessness. As evidenced in the pages of *American City & County* during the past 80 years, local governments continually have struggled to provide services to citizens, and to somehow maintain and improve infrastructure facilities. The term "crisis" crops up throughout those eight decades of publishing.

But crisis is defined as a "turning point," as an opportunity to make choices and to renew dedication. Crisis also presents the chance for creativity and innovation, for public-sector "inventors" and entreprenuers to use the necessity of the time to bring together partners and new ideas. It is a time for cooperation and innovation.

America's local governments periodically must be jolted into creative action, as they are now, when more-convenient, although not necessarily better, methods of providing services are taken away. Throughout the country's history, crisis — the true Mother of Invention — has resulted in improvements for the nation's cities and counties.

That is true today as much as any time in American history, when declining federal assistance, decaying infrastructure and poverty-related problems are taxing local resources beyond their limits. But local public officials are coping — through partnerships between governments and the private sector, modernization of facilities and processes, new technology, and innovative financing arrangements.

Governments are cooperating among themselves more in an effort to pool resources for such services as water supply and waste disposal. Seven cities in Illinois worked together to improve their water supply (1987 *American City & County* Award of Merit winner), as did six governmental units in Ottawa County, Mich., and two near St. Louis (1986 Award of Merit). Nine counties in Minnesota combined to build a waste-to-energy facility in Fergus Falls, Minn. So did 33 communities in Connecticut.

New technology, too, has played a role, often finding eager innovators among public officials.

In San Jose, Calif., water-conservation devices are being installed in 13,000 homes, with the goal of reducing wastewater flows by 10 percent and eliminating the need for a proposed $64-million treatment plant. New geographic mapping and infrastructure-maintenance systems (as discussed in this issue) are helping streamline public-works and utility billing operations.

Microwave teleconferencing (in this issue) is reducing judicial costs in Florida. Computer-controlled sensors imbedded in roadways are helping Chicago lower its snow-removal costs. New paving fabrics have reduced future maintenance needs, and in Tustin, Calif., a voice-mail system is improving the productivity of city personnel.

Innovative financial techniques also are helping local governments deal with today's crises. Tax-amnesty programs in Massachusetts and Philadelphia have recouped millions of dollars. In Fort Worth, Texas, citizens eagerly bought up city bonds, with proceeds earmarked for infrastructure improvements. Florida communities are leading the way in assessing impact fees on new development to pay for infrastructure additions and improvements that such development demands.

Cities, counties and states are learning to work with each other, for the benefit of all, in finding new solutions to old problems. They are actively involving the private sector in these new partnerships, a necessary step in bringing the entire resources of a community to bear on common problems. Such public/private partnerships manifest themselves not only in contracting out or privatization programs, but also in activities such as those ongoing in St. Paul, Minn., to help the hungry and homeless.

Perhaps crisis is what it takes to spur these innovations. Perhaps the street has to cave in before action is taken. Or maybe the new ideas are always there and are just more noticeable when our consciousness is raised. Whatever the reason, our current "crisis" is just the latest challenge to local governments. They have responded before, and they obviously are doing so again. □

— Ken Anderberg

MUNICIPAL COST INDEXES

All four indexes registered slight increases in June, with the **Consumer Price Index** showing the most gain, 0.4 percent from last month's 116.0. The **Municipal Cost Index** rose 0.3 percent from May's 113.1. The **Producer Price Index** also climbed 0.3 percent, to 104.8, while the **Construction Cost Index** indicated the least gain, a 0.2-percent rise to 116.9.

Several commodities dropped from last month, including coal, diesel fuel, fuel oil no.2, and gasoline. Residual fuel dropped the most from last year, 16.1 percent to 42.2, while LP gas rose 2.7 percent.

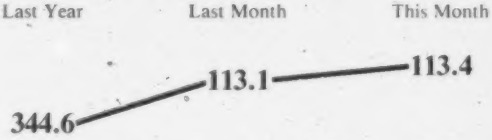
—Compiled by Tim Darnell

THIS MONTH'S MARKETBASKET

	Current Index	Percent Change From: Last Month	Last Year
Air Conditioners	112.2	0.2	3.1
Apparel	109.6	−0.2	1.4
Asphalt Roofing	93.6	−1.0	3.1
Chemicals, Industrial	102.4	4.1	9.3
Coal	96.3	−0.4	−2.7
Concrete Products	109.8	0.2	0.5
Construction Machinery	110.9	0	2.3
Diesel Fuel	50.3	−2.3	1.2
Electric Components	116.0	0.2	1.1
Electric Lamps	122.2	0.1	0.7
Electric Power	107.8	−0.2	−0.8
Engines, I.C.	111.0	0.3	1.6
Fans, Blowers	112.2	−0.3	1.3
Fertilizers, Mixed	104.3	0.6	7.4
Floor Coverings	112.3	0	2.8
Flow Instruments	115.8	−0.3	2.5
Footwear	114.3	0.1	5.4
Foundry Products	108.1	0.7	2.8
Fuel Oil No. 2	49.3	−5.0	−1.8
Furniture	116.7	0.3	4.2
Gasoline	53.6	−0.4	−2.7
Generator Sets	119.5	0.1	4.4
Glass	109.3	0.5	2.3
Glass Containers	112.5	−0	−1.1
Gypsum Products	115.0	−0.1	−9.5
Hardware	112.2	0.3	2.9
Heating Equipment	116.4	0.1	0.6
HVAC Controls	113.9	0.2	0.4
LP Gas	54.2	2.7	−4.4
Lubricants	103.7	0.8	5.2
Lumber	132.3	0.6	6.5
Metal Fabrications	111.5	1.4	7.2
Millwork	120.8	0.5	4.0
Motor Vehicle Parts	106.4	0.3	0.2
Mowers	113.0	−0.1	1.2
Natural Gas	77.3	−0.1	−6.1
Office Machines	106.2	0.4	2.9
Paint	111.6	0.6	7.4
Paper	119.7	0.8	9.4
Passenger Cars	111.5	−0.1	−0.3
Plumbing Fixtures	125.2	1.2	5.8
Plywood	103.5	0.7	0.1
Portland Cement	102.5	0.1	−0.7
Residual Fuel	42.2	−4.3	−16.1
Sand, Gravel	119.7	−0.3	2.0
Sanitary Papers	109.8	0.2	0.5
Soaps, Detergents	111.7	0.2	3.3
Sporting Goods	105.1	−0.2	3.5
Steel Mill Products	108.1	0.4	7.3
Struc. Clay Products	123.9	0.4	3.4
Switchgear	112.4	1.1	1.9
Tires, Tubes	95.3	−0.2	3.1
Transformers	108.2	0.4	1.2
Trucks	110.9	0.1	−2.3
Valves	111.5	0.8	3.1
Wire, Cable	124.1	−4.6	22.1
Wiring Devices	122.5	0.7	4.5

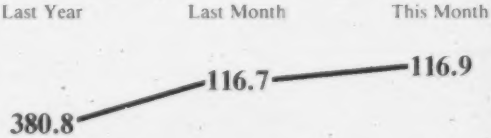
At-A-Glance Changes

MUNICIPAL COST INDEX



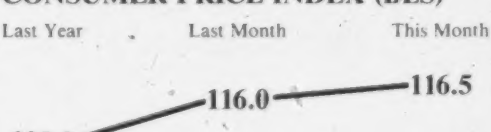
Percent Change From Last: Month **0.3** Year **4.1**

CONSTRUCTION COST INDEX



Percent Change From Last: Month **0.2** Year **2.8**

CONSUMER PRICE INDEX (BLS)



Percent Change From Last: Month **0.4** Year **4.6**

PRODUCER PRICE INDEX (BLS)

Percent Change From Last: Month **0.3** Year **3.7**

QUARTERLY MUNICIPAL TRENDS

	Current Level	Percent Change From: Last Qtr.	Last Year
Receipts	657.6B	1.0	5.0
Federal Grants	103.5B	−2.4	−5.5
Durable Purchases	27.8B	3.0	11.6
Consumables	44.6B	3.5	16.7
Services	413.1B	2.1	8.2
Structures	61.4B	−2.1	−1.8
Salaries, Wages	325.6B	1.8	7.8
Surplus	87.5B	2.9	10.0
Employment	14.280M	0.3	1.8